



The Global Initiative *for* Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Summary of the report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: Just transition in the economic recovery – eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries

The recently appointed UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Mr Oliver De Schutter, presented his first report to the UN General Assembly on “The just transition in the economic recovery: eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries” ([A/75/181](#)).

The report explains how it is possible to eradicate poverty while protecting the environment and halting the climate breakdown and the depletion of biodiversity. As the world faces one of the worst economic crises due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr De Schutter explains why we must redefine our economic model in order to “build back better” and place people and the environment, instead of profit and the market, at the centre of our public policies. Relying on the integrated approach of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which reconciles eradication of poverty with planetary boundaries, the Special Rapporteur states that: “there is no trade-off between poverty eradication and accelerating the transformation towards low-carbon and biodiverse societies: it is by combining the two that we can maximize our chances of achieving both.”

The Special Rapporteur emphasises that it is not only necessary to guarantee a just transition to a low carbon economy for the workers and communities affected by the ecological transformation. To be truly transformative, this transition also needs to strengthen the rights of people in poverty and to open new spaces and opportunities for marginalized people. In the key sectors that need to be radically transformed to build sustainable and inclusive economies – energy, food, buildings and mobility— the report describes the measures States could undertake to create employment for people with low or no technical qualifications, to ensure conditions for the enjoyment of human rights and to reduce humans’ ecological footprint.

Concerning the energy transition, the Special Rapporteur recognises that efforts to move towards sustainable energy should be combined with efforts to ensure access to accessible, modern, reliable and clean energy to those who still live without electricity. The report calculates that there are 840 million people without access to electricity, many of whom are women who need to use wood or other biofuels for cooking, lighting and heating, causing millions of deaths each year due to indoor air pollution. The transition to renewable energies, however, offers better opportunities to address the needs of people in poverty. For example, because jobs in the renewable energy sector are usually of better quality than those in the fossil fuel industry and the renewable energy sector provides more opportunities



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for women. According to the report, evidence also suggests that the increase in the share of renewable energy in a country, has a positive impact on the price of electricity making it more affordable for low income households. The provision of decentralized renewable energy has also been found to have greater potential to create new jobs and to foster greater participation from local communities, ensuring that the needs of the poor are taken into consideration in energy policy.

For a just transition to be possible, the report concludes that we need “to move from an unsustainable consumption-driven growth and extractive and waste economy towards wealth redistribution and the fight against the accelerated obsolescence of consumer goods”. The COVID-crisis represents a unique opportunity to redefine the development model and to that end the Special Rapporteur provides the following key recommendations to ensure a human-rights compliant just transition to guide post-COVID-19 recovery plans:

- Finance the economic recovery through **progressive taxation schemes**;
- **Protect workers and communities affected** by the ecological transformation from the impacts on their livelihoods;
- Invest in areas such as energy, buildings, food and mobility, to capture the “triple dividend” of a **cleaner environment, decent jobs and affordable goods and services**;
- Move away from unsustainable, consumption-driven growth towards prioritizing the **reduction of inequalities over the unsustainable quest for economic growth**;
- Fight against the **premature obsolescence of consumer goods**; and
- Finally, ensure that the design and implementation of national action plans are based on **social dialogue and the participation of people living in poverty**.

For people in poverty the search for an alternative economic development model is not a luxury, it could be a matter of life or death as they are often the victims most affected by climate change and lacking the essential conditions to realize their fundamental rights. “Building back better”, says Mr De Schutter, “does not mean a return to the status quo. It means the opposite: **putting public action at the service of the eradication of poverty within planetary boundaries.**”

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